

**A Critique on Indian Rural Studies****Raveesh S.**Research Scholar, Department of Sociology,  
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**Abstract:** The extension of human hunger for knowledge is also extends its root to the domain of rural studies. Attempts are moving ahead across the globe to understand the structure and functioning pattern of village community. India, the land of villages is not lagging behind in this race. Good number of attempts has been made by socio-anthropologists to understand the diversified Indian villages. But the primary focus of our rural studies continued to be the institutions of caste, family, kinship and religion. Even though the village picture shifted from book view which borrowed from classical Hindu scripture to authentic field view, understand the rural scenario as a whole through an Indigenous way is lagging in our rural studies. One can easily identify the shadow of western influence on Indian rural studies. Indian rural studies are failed to identify the rural problems and come out with appropriate solutions to tackle the problems. This piece of writing is going to criticize the early rural studies in hand, on the other hand it emphasizes on the present day need towards Indian village studies.

**Key Words:** Rural Studies, Indian Rural Studies, Indian Villages**Introduction**

Plough, 'with this instrument 'man's nomadic mode of life ceased' and 'man could develop stable agriculture, the basic source of assured food supply'. When we look back to the history, different kinds of people were 'living in different parts of the world, different types of villages emerged with the rise and spread of agriculture. This was mainly due to differences in geographical environments in which those people lived' (Desai 1990). But even though villages appeared across the world with the advent of agriculture, they are distinct in terms of agricultural production and newly emerged social reconstruction from nomadic to settled village life. Attachment to the land and agriculture are the common feature of early villagers in all geographical locations. The settled cultivation was 'not only ensured food security to human being but also enabled him to construct the social network (Raveesh 2014). The surplus agricultural production enabled human being to become a real social animal. 'Due to greater productivity of agriculture, a section of the community could be liberated from the necessity of participating in food production and could therefore concentrate on secondary industrial or ideological activity. This gave momentum to the growth of technology, arts, science and philosophy' (Desai 1990). Human being is innovative in nature. The extension of his hunger for knowledge is also extends its roots to the domain of rural studies. Attempts are moving ahead across the globe to understand the structure and functioning pattern of village community. India, the land of villages is not lagging behind in this race.

Mother India is land of villages and 'it was in the village that 'the pulse' of India could be felt' (Jodhka 2005). M.K. Gandhi said that 'India's soul lived in her villages' (Gandhi 1946). The word 'diversity' in relation to India is not just restricted to race, region, caste, language, flora and fauna but also extends to villages. Due to vast geographical area one can find diversified villages in India and the country is basically agriculture based village society. When it comes to the rural studies in India, much of Indian society is understood through village studies, like institutions, structures and functioning patterns, but much of the studies have been towards urban related issues. Even though, much of the urban process is the replica of urbanization in the already

developed western societies, answers for our social problems are not being seen from the Indian structural point of view. The diversity, vastness and numerical strength which are reside in villages with voluminous knowledge systems, rural studies in India have not gone beyond descriptive understanding. 'The origin of village studies in India dates back at least to the colonial era. The colonial state, in an effort to understand/rule (after all power and knowledge are closely related) the newly conquered Indian territories, sponsored Francis Buchanan as early as 1800 to collect extensive information about, among other things, rural realities. The nationalists too, with their anti-colonial agenda, began studying rural conditions as a means to interrogate and contest colonial agrarian policies' (Mukherjee 1978). Academia is also stepped its feet in rural studies, the best known 'academic studies from south India is the survey of 11 villages conducted in 1916 by Gilbert Slater and his students from the University of Madras' (Jayaranjan 1996).

**1950s and 1960s – The Decades of Rural Studies in India**

The 1950s and 1960s are the milestone decades in the domain of rural studies in India. 'Having found a relevant subject matter in the village, anthropologists (many of whom were either from the west or were Indian scholars trained in the Western universities) initiated field studies in the early 1950s' (Jodhka 2005). 'A number of short essays providing brief accounts of individual villages were published by these anthropologists in the newly launched Indian journal called The Economic Weekly (which later came to be known as Economic and Political Weekly ) during October 1951 and May 1954' and a 'large number of monographs were produced during these two decades (Jodhka 2005). 'So popular was this area of research that researchers came to be identified with the village they studied. Srinivas's Rampura, Dube's Shamirpet, Andre Beteille's Sripuram, or Ishvaran's Shivapur became legendary pairs of names' (Dhanagare, 1993: 54-55).

**Western Influence**

It is very much sure that all villages across the world are not alike. For instance, in a country like India, 'rural society is divided into a number of regional rural

societies' (Desai 1990). Jodhka said that 'There were also different kinds of villages in different parts of the country. Even within a particular region of the country, not all the villages were alike' (Jodhka 2005). Social, economical, political, cultural and geographical elements differ from region to region. The rural settlement across the world is vary due to vary in geographical features and during their evolution villages developed their own way of life. Before the villages kept open their network with the outer world, they developed their own way of life including language, production and consumption, medical system, norms and values to control their members. Since villages developed in such a way before the era of geographical connectivity, how one can generalize villages on a global scale?. Does western and Indian villages are same in all aspects to borrow the theoretical as well as technical elements towards rural study from west to India?

The early socio-anthropologist who took up rural studies in India are 'either from the west or were Indian scholars trained in the Western universities (Jodhka 2005). The studies towards country side are unscientific due to western prejudice and systematic reproduction of bookish knowledge. Our 'Indian sociologists who studied villages could not develop an adequate theory of their own' (Sunil 2013). Even the " 'Village', 'caste', 'tribe', 'religion', 'tradition', 'civilisation' or even 'jajmani system', were all taken over from the earlier colonial discourses on India by the social anthropologists without any apparent reflections or hesitations. Theoretical resources too were borrowed from the western academy with a sense of faith" (Jodhka 2005). Andre Beteille in his writing 'Six Essays in Comparative Sociology' said that 'the conceptual identity of village with peasant community 'is rooted in European ideology and European scholarship'" (Beteille, 1974b:47).

#### Method used for Rural Studies

As we discussed earlier, not only geographical locations are distinct, each and every society in this world is distinct, standing and sustaining on their own values. Every society has its own way of life and it is immense necessity to understand each society individually keeping the time frame in mind. It is not so easy to generalize the methods which developed in social science to understand the distinct societies. When it comes to rural studies in India, the methods used for the rural studies borrowed from western countries. The method used in early village studies is participant observation. The "participant-observation" method was seen as a method that 'understood social life from within, in terms of the values and meanings attributed to it by the people themselves' (Beteille, 1996:10). 'A typical piece of intensive field-work was one in which the worker lived for a year or more among a community of perhaps four or five hundred people and studied every detail of their life and culture; in which he came to know every member of the community personally; in which he was not content with generalised information, but studied every feature of life and custom in concrete detail and by means of the vernacular language' (River in Beteille and Madan, 1975:2). Andre Beteille said 'In moving from tribal to village studies, social anthropologists retained one very important feature of their craft, the method of intensive field work.... Those standards were first established by Malinowski and his pupils at the London School of Economics in the twenties, thirties and forties, and by the fifties, they had come to be adopted by

professional anthropologists the world over' (Beteille, 1996:233-4). The above statements of the experts clearly represents that, the tools which used in rural studies in India were borrowed from the west and the researchers in this domain were failed to build an indigenous method to understand the rural scenario.

#### The Illusion of 'Little Republics', 'Isolation' and 'Self Sufficiency'

The three major socio-anthropological jargons which emerged out of the early Indian rural studies were 'Isolation', 'Self-Sufficiency' and 'Little Republics'. 'It was during the British colonial rule that India was first essentialised as a land of 'village republics' (Jodhka 2005). 'The idea of the isolation and self-sufficiency of the Indian village was first propounded by Sir Charles Metcalfe in 1830, and since then it has had distinguished supporters, scholars as well as politicians. Sir Henry Maine and Karl Marx supported the idea, and in recent times, Mahatma Gandhi and his followers not only stated that Indian village was traditionally self-sufficient but also wanted a political programme which would restore to these villages their pristine self-sufficiency' (Srinivas 1960). Even though the time of origin of these terminologies is long back, the flow of these terminologies is still continues in sociological literature with some alteration. M.N. Srinivas and A.M. Shah who criticized these conventional ideas and said that 'the incredibly bad roads, the heavy monsoon, the growing of food crops and vegetables, the existence of barter and the powerful sense of membership of the village community have all given students an illusion of self-sufficiency and of isolation' (Srinivas 1960). Andre Beteille in his Sripuram studies said 'at least as far back in time as living memory went, there was no reason to believe that the village was fully self-sufficient in the economic spare' (Beteille 1996).

Charles Metcalfe's statement 'Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds to revolution; Hindoo, Pathan, Moghul, Mahratta, Sikh, English are all masters in turn, but the village communities remain the same' (as in Srinivas) is outdated. Surinder S Jodhka criticized the content of village picture which recorded in early rural studies and said that 'the early village picture was derived from dominant "Book view" which borrowed from classical Hindu scriptures by Indologists (Jodhka 2005). 'The village in India, where life was once portrayed as 'unchanging' and 'idyllic', has in recent decades seen profound changes' (Gupta 2005). Today's Indian villages are not 'Little Republics' in reality. From agricultural seeds, fertilizers, machinery to the agriculture markets, from post office to the modern cell phone, from tooth paste, cloth, slipper to the perfume, from medicine, transport, electricity, education to the police station and court, villages are depended on outer world. The scenario of Indian villages is under tremendous change.

When we look at the present Indian rural scenario, villages have crossed all these illusionary borders and they are in the next level i.e. 'Migrating Villages'. An interesting new cycle is outer world is entering into the Indian villages and making remarkable changes in country side in one hand. On the other hand, villagers are suffering from lack of livelihood opportunities and basic amenities in their native place and moving from villages in search of livelihood and better amenities. The 'village economy itself lost its sustain power'. Agriculture is not reliable area today;

country's 'agriculture has always lurched from crisis to crisis. If the monsoons are good then there are floods, if they are bad there are droughts, if the production of mangoes is excellent then there is a glut and prices fall, if the onion crops fail then that too brings tears' and the present 'agrarian economy is forcing people to look elsewhere for both livelihood and respect' (Gupta 2005). Statistics indicates that during the last 50 years rural population has decreased from 82.0 to 68.9 percent.

### Rural Studies v/s Rural Reconstruction

As we discussed earlier today's Indian villages are not nether 'Little Republics' or 'Isolated' nor 'Self-Sufficient' in reality. From agricultural seeds, fertilizers, machinery to the agriculture markets, from post office to the modern cell phone, from tooth paste, cloth, slipper to the perfume, from medicine, transport, electricity, education to the police station and court, villages are depended on outer world. 'Not only outer world is entering into the Indian villages but also villagers welcoming the change' (Raveesh 2014). The social institutions of rural society are under transmission. Agriculture, the main source of livelihood in rural area; Family system, once believed as unbreakable; Caste, which believed as 'closed system'; Marriage, which is the 'bunch of restrictions' etc are undergoing a significant change.

The current Indian rural society is suffering from various burning problems. Rural reconstruction is the present day need. The conventional rural studies which took place in India may give a picture of rural scenario but they can't come out with a suggestion to tackle rural problems. Rural studies have to move a step forward to find an appropriate solution to rural problems. The rural picture which one can see in literature is outdated. The present village scenario is different; it is a bunch of hurdles. The social integrity of village is losing its thread. Indian villages are not self sufficient today, indeed, they are kept open for the world market. Economic resources are playing a crucial role in rural life. From western rulers to western trade policies Indian villages experienced various changes in their structure. The present ruralites are suffering from livelihood problems. Statistics indicates that during the last 50 years rural population has decreased from 82.0 to 68.9 percent. The rural population decreased from 72.19% to 68.84% between 2001 and 2011 censuses (2011 censuses).

Rural reconstruction is the present day need. The Indian villages are suffering from lack of livelihood opportunities and good amenities. The political agenda and administrative records are far away from the reality. It is very much clear that ruralites are migrating from

rural to urban area in search of livelihood opportunities and better amenities. Up course the social condition also forcing to migrate. The rural studies have to invent for the opportunities to create livelihood in Indian villages. The idea of this argument is not to degrade the urban studies but to re-boost the rural studies in a focused manner to address the rural problems.

### Conclusion

India is land of villages and the heartbeat of this nation resided in the countryside. The culture which got recognition at the global level has its root in the villages. Even though good number of attempts has been made to understand the countryside by the anthropologists and sociologists, understand the rural scenario as a whole, finding the problems which are threatening the rural life and inventing the solutions to tackle such problems to strengthen the rural life is lagging in our rural studies. We are much expertize in reproducing the literature which relates to rural life that is far away from the reality. It is the urgent need to internalize the changing rural life to switch over our mindset from the illusionary status to the reality.

Early rural studies kept open the hidden characteristics of village life; we honor the ancestor in the domain of rural studies for their valuable contribution. But, we need more focused studies to understand the changing rural scenario and to strengthen the rural settlement. The rapid rural-urban migration in India clearly exhibits the socio-economic unrest in the country side. Including health, education, transport, housing etc, rural life is commercialized. In one hand economic factors are judging the living standard of the ruralites, on the other hand agriculture; the main source of livelihood is becoming non-profitable area day by day due to increased input cost and decreased demand for the agricultural products in the national and international market.

'Motherland is greater than heaven'. Ruralites may migrating to the urban area due to push and pull factors, but urban settlement can't give psychological satisfaction to the migrated country people. In many instances they are only physically present!. The international migration is occupying a greater attention in the eyes of experts but not the rural-urban migration, not the people who are having greater attachment on their native villages! The domain experts with relates to rural development i.e. sociologists, economists, scientists, technicians, policy makers, administrators and politicians are working on a separate track. But we need an integrated effort to identify the problems and come out with the appropriate solutions.

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